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ORIGINAL

Academic Libraries and the Learning Society

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ABSTRACT

Because libraries are so closely linked to education, they will play a fundamental role in the transition to the Learning Society proposed in "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform," the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The Department of Education's Strengthening Research Library Resources Program, authorized under Title II-C of the Higher Education Act, has assisted in the operation of several library projects in the Chicago area, most notably aiding the University of Chicago in strengthening its ability to provide access to many of its resources. The Strengthening Research Library Resources Program acknowledges the special significance of the nation's major research libraries in contributing to and improving higher education and research; ideally, work done under the program has led to the development of an effective network of research library resources. Academic librarians should expand and share these resources, using them to augment every aspect of education and research. Teacher training in particular is an area which can especialy benefit from the close connection between education and libraries. Academic librarians face the challenge of identifying the role their libraries should play within the context of "A Nation at Risk." (KM)

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Good evening.

I extend greetings to you from Secretary T.H. Bell and on behalf of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement. It is a pleasure to welcome you to the academic library seminar for the "Libraries and the Learning Society" project. A busy and challenging agenda faces you, both this evening and tomorrow, so I will keep my remarks brief.

The theme for this seminar is taken from A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. This report came out like a firebell in the night -- awakening our generation to a sudden and real danger. We are schooling many but really educating a few. In a world of ever-accelerating competition and change in the condition of the workplace, of new and greater challenges on the frontiers of knowledge, and in a very obvious transition from an "Industrial Age" to our "Information Society," we must muster our resources and focus on the goal of creating a Learning Society. Libraries have a fundamental role to play in this process, since libraries and education are so tightly interwoven as to be inseparable.

It is both a personal and professional pleasure for me to be here in Chicago at this particular seminar. On the personal side, Chicago is my home town - I was born and raised not too far from here. On the professional side, I did my undergraduate work at Loyola University, one of several distinguished universities and colleges in the Chicago area. And, needless to say, I count myself as fortunate to have had access to the rich holdings of all the Chicago area libraries--academic, public, independent research and museum libraries--which contributed to the

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quality and excellence of my undergraduate and graduate work. So I am not a stranger to good libraries and library services as well as capable, helpful librarians.

It is also with great pleasure that I note that many substantive library projects have been (and are now being) operated at some of the great libraries here in the Chicago area under one of the Department of Education's programs -- namely, the "Strengthening Research Library Resources Program" authorized under Title II-C of the Higher Education Act. These beneficial and useful projects include the following:

- o A notable preservation project conducted at the famous Chicago Art Institute at a cost of $163,000, included the restoration, photo-duplication, and microfilming of Daniel Burnham's Plan of Chicago; Burnham's collection is an essential addition to the history and architecture of Chicago. Burnham's work focused on the design and architecture which gives us much historical information on Chicago. An advocate of advance planning, he once said "Make No Little Plans", a view which could be said to represent the spirit of Chicago and Chicagoans.
- o Another important preservation project has been at the Newberry Library in 1981 at a cost of $131,000, which preserved and replaced rare and unique holdings in British History and local and family history;
- o A significant African Studies project took place at Northwestern University in 1983 at a cost of $250,000 involving both collection development and bibliographic control; and

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o There have been several bibliographic projects at the Center for Research Libraries - the Nation's "Library for Libraries" - since 1981 at a cost to date of over $650,000 to provide access for scholars and researchers to thousands of previously inaccessible resources. The Center for Research Libraries is located adjacent to the University of Chicago providing easy access for the University of Chicago community.

But by far our largest measure of support has been to our host institution, the University of Chicago, where almost three-quarter of a million dollars has been provided to assist in variety of bibliographic control, preservation, and collection development projects to strengthen their capability to provide access to, and utilization of, many of their singularly rich and unique resources. Perhaps foremost among these was their effort, from 1979 through 1982, to add thousands of bibliographic entries to the national data bases for their specialized holdings in South Asian studies, and to strengthen their internationally unique collection of Iranian studies resources.

I would also like to mention some of the activities being carried out under the auspices of our Office which relates to the work you are doing. As I indicated, one of our most important programs, the "Strengthening Research Library Resources Program" authorized under Title II-C of the Higher Education Act, has acknowledged the special significance of our Nation's major research libraries in contributing to and improving higher education and research.

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The most significant characteristics of the Title II-C program has been its emphasis on resource sharing, so that our nation's richest library holdings, which are in the hands of a relatively few great libraries, can be made readily accessible to the hundreds of other not-so-fortunate colleges and universities desperately in need of the highly specialized, and often unique, holdings of the larger, more affluent institutions. We hope that the work done under this program has led to the development of a true and effective national network of research library resources, so that at any given time, at any given place, and for any given educational need, a complete list or package of specialized resources of high quality can be marshalled quickly to support scholarly endeavor.

I trust that the basic premise of the Title II-C program will enter into your deliberation, since no library — neither Harvard, nor Yale nor the University of Chicago -- can stand alone. As John Donne said about humanity — "No Man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a....part of the main."

So it is with libraries in particular and higher education in general; we must group, regroup, cooperate, innovate, experiment, share, and strive together steadfastly toward reaching the common goal of improving our Nation's House of Education. By such dedicated effort, we will continue to keep this Nation great and educated. Such determination is a unique and singular characteristic of our Nation: Americans can do anything when they put their minds and backs to it. As President Ronald Reagan mentioned in his State of the Union address: "America is too great for small dreams."

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I have long believed that a college or university is only as good as its library, and that the quality of its learning aspirations and achievements is in direct proportion to the quality of its librarians, library services and library resources. We may have great teachers in our colleges and universities; we also need great resources. There is a relationship between great teaching and library resources. In my professional judgment, the academic library and its resources are the lifeblood of learning and research. Since our colleges and universities represent the educational and intellectual strength of the Nation, the challenge of A Nation at Risk must be a welcome challenge that we willingly embrace. If our best minds cannot solve the educational problems facing the Nation today, then we may ask who can?

There is one major question, we need to address:...Now, what can the academic library community do to join in this effort, in its special and unique way? Let me throw out a few random thoughts:

- o Since the nation's colleges and universities themselves educate and train the future school teachers and school administrators, academic librarians within those institutions can devise ways to assist in improving these training programs by selecting and enriching their collections to support the schools and departments of education;
- o Since the nation's teacher training institutions are in critical need of additional library resources and the fiscal constraints imposed are difficult to surmount, surely academic librarians can address themselves to efficient and effective ways of sharing resources in order to maximize their usage;

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- o Since the Nation's departments and schools of education are situated in literally hundreds of communities throughout the country, academic librarians can augment the teaching resources of the local classroom teacher through cooperative efforts, and not stand as ivory towers on nearby hills distant and remote from the classroom.
- o Since the retraining of classroom teachers and school librarians is an ongoing, fundamental activity in any forward-looking school system, the academic librarian can provide expert, effective guidance as to how these retraining efforts can be made more productive;
- o Since local community and junior colleges constitute one of the largest providers of the first two years of college education for some individuals, who select classroom teaching as a professional career, the academic librarian can promote cooperative activities, to enrich the programs offered by these institutions;
- o Since many of the great universities of the Nation contain outstanding Colleges of Education (including our host institution), surely these universities and their academic librarians can serve as "lighthouses" and "beacons" to light the path for the smaller, less affluent institutions;
- o And since all Americans, including academic librarians, have a stake in the nation's educational future, surely their national, regional, and State professional associations can establish conferencing priorities in an effort to design strategies to implement the findings and recommendations of A Nation at Risk.

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In addition, while A Nation at Risk seems to dwell on the sad state of our Nation's secondary schools, you should not lose sight of the dramatic charge of that Report challenging all of us to create the true Learning Society, wherein the educational process (in all forms and at all age levels) takes place both formally and informally. How you, as academic librarians, can take cognizance of that wisdom and assist in weaving a rich educational fabric for our entire society is another of your challenges today and tomorrow.

Concluding Remarks

This seminar is the second of five seminars being held to hear the views of the library community and others who are deeply involved and concerned with the role of libraries in education and in a true Learning Society. This particular group faces the challenge of identifying the role academic libraries should play within the context of the findings and recommendations of A Nation at Risk. According to the Commission on Excellence there is a bell - gloomy and foreboding — tolling over our schoolhouses today. While it is a somber one, it is not a death knell. It is only a warning bell: that we had better get our educational house in order as quickly and effectively and judiciously as possible. I trust that this distinguished assemblage through its deliberations tomorrow, will greatly assist in changing the tone and peal of that bell. Tomorrow should be a day of lively discussion. I look forward to hearing your recommendations.

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